

APPLICATION FOR UNITED STATES LETTERS PATENT

FOR

Multi-Version Hosting Of Application Services

Inventor(s):

**William A Pugh
Brendan X MacLean**

Prepared by:

COLUMBIA IP LAW GROUP, PC

"Express Mail" label number EL910784364US

Multi-Version Hosting Of Application Services

Related Application

This application is a continuation-in-part application of U.S. Application
5 number 09/803,178, entitled "Multi-Version Hosting of Application Services", filed on
March 9, 2001.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

10 1. **Field of the Invention**

The present invention relates to the field of hosting application services. More specifically, the present invention relates to the issue of concurrently hosting application services with multiple versions of the hosting services.

15 2. **Background Information**

With advances in integrated circuit, microprocessor, networking and communication technologies, increasing number of devices, in particular, digital computing devices, are being networked together. Devices are often first coupled to a local area network, such as an Ethernet based office/home network. In turn the
20 local area networks are interconnected together through wide area networks, such as ATM networks, Frame Relays, and the like. Of particular notoriety is the TCP/IP based global inter-networks, the Internet.

As a result this trend of increased connectivity, increasing number of applications that are network dependent are being deployed. Examples of these
25 network dependent applications include but are not limited to, email, net-based telephony, world wide web and various types of e-commerce. Further, increasing

number of software applications that were traditionally licensed or distributed through discrete distribution medium, such as diskettes, CDROMs and the like, are being distributed online or offered as web based applications, through private intranets or public networks like the Internet.

5 The increased popularity of network based applications and offering of traditional software applications as application services have in turn led to the emergence of application service providers who host application services for their developers, to relieve the developers from having to maintain and operate the underlying infrastructure. To differentiate from one another, application service
10 providers may offer hosting services or hosting runtime supports that offer functionality, usability or performance improvements over their competitors.

 Thus, just like any traditional system and subsystem software developers, application service providers have a need to continually upgrade and enhance their hosting runtime services. Likewise, just like any traditional system and subsystem
15 software, the upgrades and enhancements could have significant impact on the application services they host or support. In fact, the impact of upgrades or enhancements to the hosting service runtime support potentially could be more profound than traditional system or subsystem software. In the case of traditional system/subsystem software, generally not all licensees upgrade their system at the
20 same time. As a result, they tend to impact the earlier adopters only. However, in the case of application service providers, once the upgrades or enhancements are promoted, all hosted application services (and their millions of users) are immediately impacted. Thus, it is desirable for application service providers to provide concurrent support for multiple versions of its hosting services or runtime
25 support to allow gradual adoption of the new versions by the hosted application services.

However, offering concurrent support of multiple versions is not simply a matter of making the various versions available. Preferably, the concurrent support is provided in a transparent manner to the hosted applications, automatically employing the appropriate version of hosting services/runtime support. Further, as time goes on, the multiplicity of versions would inevitably become a significant burden to the application service providers, and resources become inefficiently utilized. For example, only a handful of infrequently used application services may still require the earlier versions of the runtime services. Thus, to treat all versions equally, in terms of initialization, resource allocations and like, would be extremely costly and inefficient.

Accordingly, a new approach to hosting application services, and operating the resources of an application service provision apparatus to facilitate multi-version hosting of application services is needed.

15

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Successor versions of an application service provision runtime library of an application service provision apparatus are provided with corresponding update services to facilitate upgrade of applications to selected ones of the successor versions on request.

In various embodiments, a dispatcher of the application service provision apparatus is provided with complementary functions to coordinate the servicing of the upgrade requests.

25

In one embodiment, an application submits an upgrade request to the update service of the application's current version of the runtime library used. In response,

the update service notifies the dispatcher of the request. The dispatcher then notifies the update service of the first successor version of the runtime library, which in response, upgrades the application to use the successor version of the runtime library. The dispatcher successively repeats the process until the desired version of
5 the runtime library is reached. Each of the update services is equipped to upgrade the application from an immediate predecessor version of the runtime library.

In an alternate embodiment, in response, the dispatcher notifies the update service of the target version of the runtime library directly, which in response, upgrades the application to use the target version of the runtime library. Each of the
10 update services is equipped to upgrade the application from any predecessor version of the runtime library.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

15

The present invention will be described by way of exemplary embodiments, but not limitations, illustrated in the accompanying drawings in which like references denote similar elements, and in which:

20

Figure 1 illustrates an overview of the present invention, including an application service provision apparatus having one or more components to perform a dispatching and a shared resource monitoring function, in accordance with one embodiment;

Figure 2 illustrates the operational flow of the relevant aspects of the dispatching function of **Fig 1**, in accordance with one embodiment;

Figure 3 illustrates a data structure suitable for use by the dispatching function of **Fig. 1** to track the required version of the runtime library, in accordance with one embodiment;

5 **Figure 4** illustrates a data structure suitable for use by the shared resource monitoring function of **Fig. 1** to track the last used time of shared resource allocations, in accordance with one embodiment;

Figure 5 illustrates the operational flow of the relevant aspects of the shared resource monitoring function of **Fig 1**, in accordance with one embodiment;

10 **Figure 6** illustrates an internal component view of a computer system suitable for use to practice the present invention, in accordance with one embodiment;

15 Figures **7a-7c** illustrate the operational flow of the relevant aspects of the update services of the various versions of the runtime library and the dispatcher to facilitate upgrade of an application from one version to a successor version, in accordance with one embodiment; and

Figures **8a-8c** illustrate the operational flow of the relevant aspects of the update services of the various versions of the runtime library and the dispatcher to facilitate upgrade of an application from one version to a successor version, in accordance with another embodiment.

20

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

25 In the following description, various aspects of the present invention will be described. However, it will be apparent to those skilled in the art that the present invention may be practiced with only some or all aspects of the present invention.

For purposes of explanation, specific numbers, materials and configurations are set forth in order to provide a thorough understanding of the present invention. However, it will also be apparent to one skilled in the art that the present invention may be practiced without the specific details. In other instances, well known features are

5 omitted or simplified in order not to obscure the present invention.

Parts of the description will be presented in terms of operations performed by a processor based device, using terms such as data, tables, accepting, determining, inquiring, notifying, caching, routing, loading, and the like, consistent with the manner commonly employed by those skilled in the art to convey the substance of their work

10 to others skilled in the art. As well understood by those skilled in the art, the quantities take the form of electrical, magnetic, or optical signals capable of being stored, transferred, combined, and otherwise manipulated through mechanical and electrical components of the processor based device; and the term processor include microprocessors, micro-controllers, digital signal processors, and the like, that are 15 standalone, adjunct or embedded.

Various operations will be described as multiple discrete steps in turn, in a manner that is most helpful in understanding the present invention, however, the order of description should not be construed as to imply that these operations are necessarily order dependent. In particular, these operations need not be performed 20 in the order of presentation. Further, the description repeatedly uses the phrase "in one embodiment", which ordinarily does not refer to the same embodiment, although it may.

Overview

25 Referring now to **Figure 1**, wherein a block diagram illustrating an overview of the present invention, including an application service provision apparatus equipped

with a dispatching and a shared resource monitoring function, in accordance with one embodiment, is shown. As illustrated, application service provision apparatus **108** hosts a number of application services, e.g. **116i** and **116n**, on behalf of their

developers. Apparatus **108**, enabled by features of the present invention, is

5 advantageously equipped with different versions of runtime support, also referred to as the runtime library, e.g. **114i** and **114n**. The different hosted application services, for stability and/or other reasons, "require" these different versions of the runtime library. For example, application services **116n** (perhaps because of certain new features offered) require the latest version **114n** of the runtime library, while

10 application services **116i** (perhaps because of backward compatibility reasons)

"require" an earlier version **114i** of the runtime library. Clients **102a** and **102b** access these various application services, e.g. **116i** and **116n** (hereinafter, simply **116***), through networking fabric **106**, using various known messaging protocols (e.g. HTTP) signaled in accordance with various known communication protocols (e.g. TCP/IP).

15 In addition to the hosted application services **116*** and the various versions of the runtime library, e.g. **114i** and **114n** (hereinafter, also simply **114***), apparatus **108** also includes one or more resources shared by the application services **116*** and/or the functions of the runtime library **114***, e.g. memory resource **120**. Further, in accordance with the present invention, apparatus **108** is provided with dispatcher

20 function **110**, and shared resource monitor function **118** to facilitate the current support of the multiple versions of runtime library, and efficient operation of the resources. Moreover, for the embodiment, dispatcher function **110** also has an associated application and runtime (RT) library version mapping cache **112**.

More specifically, dispatcher function **110** is employed to perform the

25 dispatching function, i.e. routing of requests for service from clients **102a-102b** to selected ones of the application services hosted. As will be described in more details

below, in one embodiment, dispatcher function 110 advantageously performs the dispatching or routing in a manner that allows the earlier versions of runtime library 114* to be loaded on an as needed basis, thereby enabling apparatus 108 to support the multiple version as well as operate more efficiently. Monitor function 118 is 5 employed to perform a monitoring function to allow resources such as memory resource 120 to be shared among application services 116* hosted and/or the functions of runtime library 114* (collectively also referred to as resource consumers at times, when convenient to do so). Accordingly, these elements together enable apparatus 108 to operate more efficiently, and in turn the practically to provider the 10 multi-version support.

Except for the provision of dispatcher function 110, its associated mapping cache 112, and monitor function 118 to facilitate efficient operation of apparatus 108, apparatus 108 including its runtime library 114*, application services 116*, client 102a/102b and networking fabric 106 are all intended to represent a broad range of 15 such elements known in the art. In particular, examples of these application services include but are not limited to email applications, e-commerce applications, word processing applications, spreadsheet applications, and so forth, and clients 102a- 102b may be wireless or wireline based computing devices of various form factors, including but are not limited to palm sized, notebook sized or desktop sized. 20 Moreover, the present invention contemplates that apparatus 108 may be implemented using one or more computer servers interconnected in any one of a number of known coupling techniques, including but are not limited to dedicated channels, local area networks or wide area networks. Examples of runtime library functions include but are not limited to security functions, script functions, database 25 access functions, and so forth. Accordingly, these elements, i.e. elements 108, 114*, 116*, 120, 102a/102b and 106, will not be further described. Dispatcher function

110, including its associated mapping cache 112, and monitor function 118 will be described in turn below.

However, before describing these elements in further detail, it should be noted that while for ease of understanding, only a handful of application services 116*, a

5 handful of runtime library versions 114* and a handful of clients 102a/102b are shown in **Fig. 1**, from the description to follow, it will be readily apparent to those skilled in the art that the present invention may be practiced with many more (as well as less) application services 116*, runtime library versions 114*, and clients 102a/102b.

Further, while for ease of understanding, dispatcher function 110 and monitor

10 function 118 are described as separate functions, they may be implemented as one or more components.

Dispatcher function

Referring now to **Figure 2**, wherein a flow diagram illustrating the relevant

15 aspects of the operation flow of dispatcher function 110, in accordance with one embodiment, is shown. The embodiment contemplates that at start up (i.e. power on/reset), for perhaps efficiency reason, only the latest version of the application service hosting runtime library 114n is loaded. Moreover, the latest version includes a dynamically callable function that upon invocation, returns the required version of

20 runtime library 114* for a particular application service hosted. As illustrated, the operation process starts with dispatcher function 110 receiving a request for service targeted for a hosted application service from a client, block 202. Upon receiving such a request, dispatcher function 110 determines if the version of the runtime library required by the targeted application service is known to itself, block 204. If the

25 version of the runtime library required by the targeted application service is not known to dispatcher 110, it invokes the earlier described dynamically callable function of the

latest version of the runtime library to obtain the version of the runtime library required by the targeted application service, block **206**. Upon obtaining the information, for the embodiment, dispatcher function **110** also caches the information in the earlier described mapping cache, thus making the information available for subsequent

5 requests targeting the same application service (until the cache line holding the information is selected for use to cache the required version information of another application service hosted). [See **Fig. 3** for an example of a data structure suitable for use as a cache for caching the required version information for the various application services hosted. An example of a suitable cache line replacement

10 scheme is a least recently used (LRU) scheme.]

Additionally, upon learning of the required version, dispatcher function **110** determines if the required version has been loaded, block **208**. If the required version of the runtime library has not been loaded (e.g. the required version is an earlier version, and it has not been required by any of the targeted application services of

15 prior requests), dispatcher function **110** loads the required earlier version of the runtime library on demand, block **210**. In alternate embodiments, the present invention may be practiced with some or all of the executable code/libraries of the one or more of the earlier versions also pre-loaded.

Upon determining that the required version is known to itself (i.e. the required

20 version information is cached in mapping cache, implying that it has previously been requested, accordingly loaded) (block **204**), or determining that the required version is not known but loaded (e.g. due to cache line replacement) (block **208**) or for some embodiments, loading the required version (e.g. being required for the first time) (block **210**), dispatcher function **110** routes the request for service to the targeted

25 application service (which will be properly supported, as the required version of the runtime library is now loaded).

Thus, it can be seen from the above description, the required version of a runtime library may be determined. Further, for various embodiments, earlier versions of runtime library **114*** are loaded only on an as needed basis, i.e. when required by an application service targeted by a request for service received from a 5 client. Accordingly, apparatus **108** may operate more efficiently, while allowing for multi-version hosting runtime support.

Monitor function

Referring now to **Figure 5**, wherein a flow diagram illustrating the relevant 10 aspects of the operation flow of monitor function **118**, in accordance with one embodiment, is shown. As described earlier, monitor function **118** is employed to facilitate the sharing of certain resources, e.g. memory resource **120**, among the resource consumers, i.e. the application services hosted and/or the functions of the various versions of the runtime library. The embodiment contemplates that various 15 portions of shared memory resource **120** are allocated to the resource consumers on an as needed basis. Moreover, the allocation and the de-allocation requests are routed through monitor function **118**. Further, the various resource consumers keep track of the usage of the various portions of shared memory resource **120** allocated. In particular, they keep track of the addresses and sizes of the allocations, as well as 20 the time of last usage of each of the allocated portions of shared memory resource **120**. An example data structure suitable for use to track such information is shown in **Fig. 4**.

As illustrated, upon initialization, monitor function **118** monitors the requests and/or allocations of the shared resource, block **502**. It further continually determines 25 if the aggregated allocation, i.e. the total current cumulative allocation, has reached a pre-determined threshold, also referred to as the “high watermark”, block **504**. As

described earlier, all allocation requests are routed through monitor function **118**, which maintains a counter to keep track of the current level of aggregated allocation.

If the high watermark has not been reached, monitor function **118** simply continues operation back at block **502**, and repeats the operation of block **504**, until eventually it

5 is determined that the aggregated allocation of shared memory resource **120** has reached the predetermined high watermark.

At such time, monitor function **118** requests the resource consumers (more specifically, those who received allocations) to provide it with the usage records of the allocated resources, block **506**. Of particular interest to be provided, is the time of

10 last use of these allocations by the corresponding recipient entities.

Upon receipt of these information from the resource consumers, monitor function **118** determines the allocated shared memory resources to be released to bring the aggregated allocation back to at most another predetermined threshold, referred to as the low watermark, block **510**. Upon making the determination, monitor

15 function **118** instructs the resource consumers to release the selected resource portions accordingly.

In one embodiment, monitor function **118** makes the determination by merging and ordering the usage information received from the resource consumers. From the merged ordered set of the usage information, monitor function **118** "speculatively"

20 selects a number of the least recently used allocations for release to attempt to bring the aggregated allocation back down to the low watermark.

Upon instructing the resource consumers, monitor function **118** continues its operation at block **512**, determining if the instructions were sufficient to bring the total consumption of the shared resource down to the low watermark. As the instructed

25 resource consumers begin to free previously allocated portions of the shared resource as instructed, monitor function **118** decrements the running counter it

maintains for the amount of shared resources having been allocated. If the instructed de-allocations were able to bring the aggregated allocation back down to the low watermark monitor function **118** repeats the operation of block **510**. In alternate embodiments, the entire sequence of operations of blocks **506-510** may be repeated

5 instead. If the action or successive actions were successful in bringing the aggregated allocation back down to the low watermark, monitor function **118** continues its operation at block **502**. Thus, memory resource **120** may be efficiently shared among the resource consumers, i.e. the hosted application services and the functions of the various versions of the runtime library.

10 As those skilled in the art would appreciate, other resources, such as data channels, may also be shared in like manner, under the control of monitor function **118** or a similar coordinator function, thereby allowing apparatus **108** to operate more efficiently.

15 Upgrade

Referring back to **Figure 1**, in accordance with another aspect of the present invention, to facilitate applications, e.g. application **116i**, to be able to upgrade to a selected one of the later versions of the runtime library, e.g. **114n**, successor versions of the runtime library, e.g. **114n**, are corresponding provided with update services (not shown) to facilitate an application, e.g. **116i**, to submit an upgrade request to upgrade the version of the runtime library the application uses to a later version, such as version **114n**. For the illustrated embodiment, each upgrade service of a version of the runtime library is equipped with the knowledge to upgrade an application from the immediate predecessor version of the runtime library. That is, each upgrade service of a version is equipped with the required compilation, linkage and/or other

20

25

processing actions of like kind to be performed. In other words, for the embodiment, an application having “fallen behind” by two versions, making a request to upgrade to the second successor version (“skipping” the immediate successor version) of the version used by the application, will nevertheless be first upgraded to the first

5 successor version, and then to the second successor version. The exact nature of the compiles, linkages and so forth, involved with each upgrade, are application dependent, and is not relevant to the essence of the present invention.

In one embodiment, dispatcher function **110** is also provided with complementary capabilities to coordinate the servicing of upgrade requests, in 10 particular, when successive upgrades crossing multiple successor versions of the runtime library is necessary to upgrade a requesting application to the desired target version of the runtime library. In alternate embodiments, the update services may communicate directly to each other, via e.g. shared data structure instead.

As will be readily apparent from the descriptions to follow, under the present 15 invention, the requests may be advantageously made at times desired by the owners of the applications.

In one embodiment, it is contemplated that an application owner will include with its application a feature to submit such an upgrade request, such that the owner of the application may submit the upgrade request from its application. Preferably, 20 the feature is “hidden” or may be invoked by a user of the application having the proper authority only. Provision of such safeguard features is within the ability of those ordinarily skilled in the art, accordingly, the subject will be not be further described.

Referring now to **Figures 7a-7c** wherein three flow charts illustrating the 25 operational flows of the relevant aspects of an update service of a version of the runtime library, and dispatcher **110**, in accordance with one embodiment, is shown.

As illustrated in **Fig. 7a**, upon receipt of a request to upgrade an application, block **702**, the update service of a version of the runtime library notifies dispatcher **110** of the request, block **704**. In one embodiment, the request may include a specification of the target version, or the request will be defaulted to the most current version of the runtime library. Alternatively, the request may be defaulted to a predecessor version of the most current version, to allow one or more versions of the runtime library to be placed into the same environment for testing, but not for general upgrade.

Preferably, whether the specification is mandatory or optional and which version of the runtime library is the default target version are all configurable by a system administrator.

10 The support for such configurability by a system administrator may be supported via any one of a number of configuration techniques known in the art; thus, will not be further described.

In any event, the target version, whether explicitly or implicitly specified, as alluded to earlier, may be the most current version of the runtime library, a predecessor version of the runtime library of one or more generation removed from the most current version of the runtime library. Viewed from another perspective, the target version may be an immediate successor version of the runtime library, a successor version of the runtime library of one or more generation removed from the version of the runtime library currently being used by the application.

20 As illustrated in **Fig. 7c**, for the illustrated embodiment, upon receipt of the upgrade request, block **722**, dispatcher **110** dispatches the request to the update service of the “next” successor version of the runtime library (which on the “first pass”, is the immediate successor version), block **724**. Thereafter, dispatcher **110** awaits for the upgrade completion notification from the notified update service, block **726**.

25 In alternate embodiments, dispatcher **110** may dispatch the request on a conditional basis, e.g. based on the “status” of the application, such as whether it has

been properly licensed for the target version, and/or whether the owner of the application is current on its payment of the licensee fees.

As illustrated in **Fig. 7b**, the notified update service of the “next” version, upon receipt of the notification, block **712**, upgrades the application accordingly, block **714**.

5 Thereafter, upon completion of the upgrade, the upgrade service notifies dispatcher **110** of the completion, block **714**.

Back at **Fig. 7c**, upon receipt of a completion notification from the previously notified update service of the “next” version of the runtime library, dispatcher **110** determines whether the desired target version has been reached or not, block **728**. If 10 the desired target version has not been reached, dispatcher **110** returns to block **724**, and continues the process from there. On the other hand, if the desired target version has been reached, the upgrade process is completed.

Accordingly, under the present invention, an owner of an application hosted by the application service of the present invention, may advantageously elect to request 15 to upgrade his/her application to use a later version of the runtime library at a time of his/her desire, and be upgraded successively

Referring back to **Figure 1** again, in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention, to facilitate applications, e.g. application **116i**, to be able to 20 upgrade to a selected one of the later versions of the runtime library, e.g. **114n**, successor versions of the runtime library, e.g. **114n**, are corresponding provided with update services (not shown) to facilitate an application, e.g. **116i**, to submit an upgrade request to upgrade the version of the runtime library the application uses to a later version, such as version **114n**. For this alternate embodiment, each upgrade 25 service of a version of the runtime library is equipped with the knowledge to upgrade an application from any predecessor version of the runtime library. That is, each

upgrade service of a version is equipped with the required compilation, linkage and/or other processing actions of like kind to be performed, to upgrade an application from any of the predecessor or down leveled runtime library versions used.

Under this alternate embodiment, dispatcher function **110** is still provided with 5 complementary capabilities to coordinate the servicing of upgrade requests. In yet other embodiments, the update services may communicate directly to each other, via e.g. shared data structure instead.

As the earlier described embodiment, it is also contemplated that an application owner will include with its application a feature to submit such an upgrade 10 request, such that the owner of the application may submit the upgrade request from its application. Preferably, the feature is “hidden” or may be invoked by a user of the application having the proper authority only. Provision of such safeguard features is within the ability of those ordinarily skilled in the art, accordingly, the subject will be not be further described.

15 Referring now to **Figures 8a-8c** wherein three flow charts illustrating the operational flows of the relevant aspects of an update service of a version of the runtime library, and dispatcher **110**, in accordance with this alternate embodiment, is shown. As illustrated in **Fig. 8a**, upon receipt of a request to upgrade an application, block **802**, the update service of a version of the runtime library notifies dispatcher **110** of the request, block **804**. As before, the request may include a specification of 20 the target version, or the request will be defaulted to the most current version of the runtime library. Alternatively, the request may be defaulted to a predecessor version of the most current version, to allow one or more versions of the runtime library to be placed into the same environment for testing, but not for general upgrade.

25 Preferably, whether the specification is mandatory or optional and which version of the runtime library is the default target version are all configurable by a system

administrator. The support for such configurability by a system administrator may be supported via any one of a number of configuration techniques known in the art; thus, will not be further described.

Thus, as before, the target version, whether explicitly or implicitly specified, as
5 alluded to earlier, may be the most current version of the runtime library, a predecessor version of the runtime library of one or more generation removed from the most current version of the runtime library. Viewed from another perspective, the target version may be an immediate successor version of the runtime library, a successor version of the runtime library of one or more generation removed from the
10 version of the runtime library currently being used by the application.

As illustrated in **Fig. 8c**, for the alternate embodiment, upon receipt of the upgrade request, block **822**, dispatcher **110** dispatches the request to the update service of the target version of the runtime library, lock **824**. Thereafter, dispatcher **110** awaits for the upgrade completion notification from the notified update service.

15 As before, dispatcher **110** may dispatch the request on a conditional basis, e.g. based on the “status” of the application, such as whether it has been properly licensed for the target version, and/or whether the owner of the application is current on its payment of the licensee fees.

As illustrated in **Fig. 8b**, the notified update service of the target version, upon
20 receipt of the notification, block **812**, upgrades the application accordingly, block **814**. Thereafter, upon completion of the upgrade, the upgrade service notifies dispatcher **110** of the completion, block **814**.

Accordingly, under this embodiment, an owner of an application hosted by the application service of the present invention, may advantageously elect to request to
25 upgrade his/her application to use a later version of the runtime library at a time of his/her desire, and be upgraded to the desire version directly.

Example Computer System

Figure 6 illustrates an example computer system suitable for use as a server for implementing application service provision apparatus 108 (or a portion thereof), in accordance with one embodiment. As shown, computer system 600 includes one or more processors 602 and system memory 604. Additionally, computer system 600 includes mass storage devices 606 (such as diskette, hard drive, CDROM and so forth), input/output devices 608 (such as keyboard, cursor control and so forth) and communication interfaces 610 (such as network interface cards, modems and so forth). The elements are coupled to each other via system bus 612, which represents one or more buses. In the case of multiple buses, they are bridged by one or more bus bridges (not shown). Each of these elements performs its conventional functions known in the art. In particular, system memory 604 and mass storage 606 are employed to store a working copy and a permanent copy of the programming instructions implementing the dispatcher and monitor functions as well as other aspects of the present invention. The permanent copy of the programming instructions may be loaded into mass storage 606 in the factory, or in the field, as described earlier, through a distribution medium (not shown) or through communication interface 610 (from a distribution server (not shown)). The constitution of these elements 602-612 are known, and accordingly will not be further described.

Conclusion and Epilog

Thus, an improved method and apparatus for hosting application services with multiple versions of the hosting runtime services, including upgrade services, has

been described. While the present invention has been described in terms of the above illustrated embodiments, those skilled in the art will recognize that the invention is not limited to the embodiments described. The present invention can be practiced with modification and alteration within the spirit and scope of the appended claims.

5 For example, the resolution of the appropriate version of the hosting services may be performed by a version other than the “latest” version (e.g. when the “latest” version is a “beta” version), as well as by other means independent of the individual versions themselves. Thus, the description is to be regarded as illustrative instead of restrictive on the present invention.

10